

## **FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL NEWS - FEBRUARY 2007**

### **Connecting with the Community through Public Scoping**

The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary held public meetings in October 2006 to “scope out” the range of issues that the sanctuary will address during its management plan review. Scoping meetings were held in 3 locations throughout the Gulf region: in Webster, TX (Houston/Galveston area) on October 17; in Corpus Christi, TX on October 19; and New Orleans, LA on October 24.

The meetings were held during the evening in an open-house format allowing members of the public to engage in discussions with sanctuary staff, take away informative and educational materials, and provide verbal or written comments. Attendees had the opportunity to view a presentation that provided an overview of the management plan process and highlighted some of the current issues facing sanctuary resources. Other displays featured sanctuary maps, slideshows and video of the coral reef community, research reports, and updates on the current state of the sanctuary. Unlike a traditional public meeting setting, the sanctuary scoping meetings were multimedia events offering information and encouraging public involvement and input.

Scoping comments from the three meetings were combined with comments received by mail, email, and fax during the open public comment period that lasted until November 10, 2006. The sanctuary received input from a total of 82 individuals, organizations and agencies, focusing on a wide variety of issues affecting the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. Topics included artificial reefs, endangered species, enforcement, harvesting, oil and gas infrastructure, pollutant discharge, regional water quality, shipping and transport, visitor use, wildlife interactions, boundary expansion, habitat connectivity, invasive species, education, global warming, hurricanes and administrative issues. Fishing, boundary expansion, and public outreach and education received more comments than other topics.

Sanctuary Advisory Council members were well represented at the scoping meetings held last fall. As our community liaisons, the Council members play an integral role in the management plan review process. Most recently, the Council has been engaged in reviewing the public comments and prioritizing the issues that will be addressed during the development of a revised management plan. At February 1, 2007 Council meeting, the Council established working groups that will each study a single issue so that they may make recommendations on strategies and activities to address that issue.

For more information on the Sanctuary Advisory Council working groups, please visit the Working Groups web page.